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PRESS RELEASE

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MPs promote safe driving over Thanksgiving

HEIDELBERG, GE -- Everyone knows they should buckle up. Despite this awareness, research shows that many Americans do not protect themselves or their children on every ride. That is why the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration launched the *Click It or Ticket Mobilization* - an enforcement campaign that targets motorists who fail to buckle themselves and their children.

Since these mobilizations began stateside:

- Child fatalities have dropped by more than 20 percent.
- Child restraint use for infants under one has risen from 85 percent to 99 percent, and restraint use among toddlers aged 1-4 has jumped from 60 to 94 percent.
- Adult seat belt use rose from 62 percent to 79 percent - the highest use rate ever - with more than 50 million Americans buckling up.

USAREUR started its own Click It or Ticket Campaign in 2002 and since then violations at checkpoints have been reduced to where they are consistently under one percent of vehicles checked.

“U.S. Military Police will again target seatbelt and drunk driving violations on military installations and in housing areas at various times between November 24th and 29th,” said Lt. Col. Carol A. McKinney, Chief of Law Enforcement Operations at the Army in Europe Office of the Provost Marshal.

She also stressed that the drivers of vans are responsible for ensuring that all passengers are buckled up. Drivers are charged if any vehicle occupant is not wearing a seatbelt or proper restraining device such as a child's car seat.

As far as drinking and driving are concerned, host nation police still catch most of the Americans stopped for drunk driving in Europe and will increase their off-post checks over the holiday weekend. McKinney added that drivers under 25 were most likely to be apprehended for alcohol-related offenses than any other group.

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Questionnaires show that most U.S. personnel apprehended mistakenly believed they were not under the influence of alcohol and could drive safely.

“I think many Soldiers underestimate the alcohol strength of the beer and liquor in Europe and pay the price for that miscalculation when the police stop them,” McKinney explained.

She advises people to think about how they are going to get back home after a night on the town **before** they leave home.

“Designated drivers, unit sponsored rides, taxis and public transportation are all good ways to get home without a career-ending conviction for drunk-driving,” she said.

For people who travel a long way to the nearest big city, she recommended booking a room at a guest house as a better alternative than losing your license. People who could walk to their favorite nightspot should do just that instead of driving, she advised.

More information on safe driving is available on the USAREUR Safety web site at www.per.hqusareur.army.mil/services/safetydivision/main.htm.